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5000 University of California Postdocs Want Union: State Labor Board Verifies Majority Support

San Francisco, Calif. — The California State Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) has verified that a majority of the 5,000 Postdoctoral Researchers (Postdocs) working at the University of California (UC) have signed union authorization cards with their union, Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/United Auto Workers (PRO/UAW) establishing their right to bargain collectively with their employer.

“We are ecstatic that PERB has verified our majority mandate to have PRO/UAW be our Union ,” said Zhaowei Liu, a Postdoc in Mechanical Engineering who works on nanoscale imaging at UC Berkeley. “We’ve been preparing for this and look forward to beginning bargaining with the University as soon as possible.”

The UAW currently represents more than 11,000 teaching assistants, readers and tutors on UC campuses, as well as more than 6,000 teaching associates, graduate assistants, tutors and graders on California State University (CSU) campuses. PERB’s confirmation followed PRO/UAW filing a petition with the labor board on June 30 to have the Union certified. With majority status confirmed, Postdocs now have the right to bargain with UC over wages, working conditions, and terms of employment.

“This is a historic moment,” said Dilnawaz Kapadia, a Postdoc who does research in immunology at UC San Francisco. “The UC is a world-renowned institution and we look forward to working productively with the administration to address our concerns around wages, benefits, workload, and our workplace rights. We are confident that this will prove to be a long and fruitful relationship with mutual benefits to the University and to the Postdocs on all UC campuses.”

After receiving a PhD or equivalent degree, researchers work as Postdocs at UC and other institutions for up to five years in a faculty supervisor’s lab, making up a large and influential portion of the nation’s non-tenured academic research workforce. Certification of PRO/UAW will be a major development in the academic labor movement, as UC’s Postdocs make up approximately 10 percent of all Postdocs working in the US.

Postdocs perform complex research in diverse fields, ranging from AIDS and cancer research, to developing more sophisticated electron microscope technology. Postdocs also publish scholarly articles and write grant proposals, helping to bring in billions of dollars in grants and contracts to the 10 UC campuses each year. Given the significant contribution these workers make to the University’s research mission, their fate is crucial to the continued success of the University.

“It’s great that the PERB has verified the decision of the Postdocs at UC to become part of the UAW,” said UAW Secretary-Treasurer Elizabeth Bunn, who directs the union’s Technical, Office and Professional (TOP) Organizing Department. “Academic workers in California and elsewhere who have made the decision join the UAW and bargain collectively with their employers have made significant economic gains and enhanced their working conditions. Postdocs at UC will now have the same opportunity.”

“We always welcome workers who want to stand up for themselves and join thousands of other workers who have chosen to be part of the UAW” said Jim Wells, director of UAW Region 5, which includes California and other states between the West Coast and Missouri.

One of the nation’s largest and most diverse unions, the UAW has more than 1 million active and retired members, with active members working in manufacturing as well as public service, higher education health care, gaming and other industries. The UAW represents workers at more than 40 universities and colleges nationwide, including 25,000 Academic Student Employees (ASEs) – Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graders, Tutors, and others – at the University of California, California State University, University of Washington , and University of Massachusetts.

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